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TAGS: PREL KDEM PGOV KE

SUBJECT: KENYATTA KEEPING HIS OPTIONS WIDE OPEN

REF: NAIROBI 2446

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) When KANU Chairman and opposition presidential hopeful Uhuru Kenyatta failed to meet the June 15 deadline for formally declaring himself an Orange Democratic Movement-Kenya (ODM-K) candidate, there was speculation that KANU was splitting from ODM-K. Kenyatta has not (yet) pulled KANU out of ODM-K, but he is suspicious of ODM-K officials' efforts to unilaterally redefine ODM-K's organizational structure to the detriment of KANU's cherished status as a distinct, historic, and national party in its own right. Kenyatta's explanation was that before he commits KANU, ODM-K must make clear whether it is a single party or a coalition.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Setting off speculation that KANU was pulling out of the opposition ODM-K coalition, Uhuru Kenyatta snubbed ODM-K's June 15 candidacy deadline. Explaining his decision, Kenyatta told the media that he would not proceed with ODM-K until it clearly defined itself as a single party, the members of which dissolve their original parties, or an umbrella coalition of corporate members. Only then will KANU determine the nature of its affiliation. KANU leaders are wary of an arrangement which does not preserve the KANU's status as a distinct, historic and national party. Kenyatta made the same demand during KANU's national meeting a week earlier (reftel), exhorting members to learn from President Kibaki's (failed) NARC coalition. Although some ODM-K members retorted that ODM-K would move on without Kenyatta, ODM-K officials responded that they would hear Kenyatta out.

¶3. (C) KANU Executive Director Njee Muturi told poloff that the basis for Kenyatta's decision not to declare himself an ODM-K candidate at the moment is the "dishonesty" of ODM-K officials. Muturi remarked that provisions in the ODM-K constitution that officials filed recently with the Registrar of Societies (a requirement of all political parties) are at variance with what the members had originally agreed to. Muturi accused some ODM-K elements of "going behind our backs" to alter the structure of the coalition. Kenyatta and KANU have long complained that ODM-K is a Raila Odinga machine (indeed, the party's homepage features Odinga's "presidential vision" speech), insisting that KANU be treated as an equal partner.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Kenyatta is treading cautiously. His motivation is likely a combination of trying to leverage his

influence within ODM-K, to shore up his hometown (Kikuyu) support base so he is not voted out of his parliamentary seat as an Odinga stooge, and to strengthen his position within KANU as a party leader. Suspicion and mistrust among ODM-K's big men has been an underlying theme since the Orange Movement evolved into a presidential platform. However, with the election looming, and each candidate facing pressure to assess where he stands in ODM-K, the misgivings may prove toxic. END COMMENT.

RANNEBERGER